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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN**

**FACULTY OF DESIGN**

**DEPARTMENT OF FASHION AND TEXTILES**

**"THE EVOLUTION OF THE TAILORED SUIT"**

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## **Introduction**

I was inspired to do this thesis on "The Evolution of Men's Tailored Garments" by my own personal interest in good quality clothing, the construction and structure of the garments, and the popularisation of tailoring in the 1990's.

The exciting changes taking place in men's fashion gave me the incentive to do a more indepth study. I therefore felt it necessary and important to research and discuss the route and development of men's tailored garments. From their origin in the 14th Century to the present day, exploring the factors that effected the evolution of the suit. The basis for this thesis is to establish and examine the path from which the contemporary suit stems and from which major developments in tailoring progressed.

The 14th Century introduced the phenomenon of cutting and shaping garments to fit the contours of the body. By the 17th Century the art of tailoring had transformed to what has remained traditionally characteristic of the suit today. The techniques have remained constant throughout and remain the basis of style in the 1990's.

Throughout my analysis of the history of men's fashion in the 20th Century, it is apparent that social, political and economical events have all influenced the progression of men's garments. During this progression it is evident that the style of the 1930's has comparital characteristics to that of the contemporary style of suit today.

The style similarity encourages a more indepth study of the 1930's period; historical events, cinema and media hype were all factors in the fluctuation of the style on to the streets.

In containing an understanding of the fashion of the 1930's and the initial similarities, it became more evident to study the contemporary tailored suit. The introduction of new technologies has enhanced the style and quality of the garment,







even though the simple, sensible style remains relatively unchanged. Technology has assisted in perfecting the style of the 1990's but still containing the elegance of the 1930's. In exploring the technologies of both periods, modern innovations have enhanced the style of the contemporary suit. The combination of the old with the new has improved the quality and variety of garments available on the streets today. The modern innovations to the tailored garments allow men to dress in a classic and elegant style, while still preserving their individuality.







## **Chapter One : History of Men's Fashion**

This chapter deals with the route and development of the suit in men's fashion and gives an overview of this evolution. It outlines the beginnings of the tailored suit in the 14th Century and then moves to the 17th Century where significant changes lead to the creation of a suit that can be seen as the "real" origin of the evolution of the modern suit. The consequent development path to the contemporary suit is then explored and expanded.

Tailoring has been an important factor in men's clothing since the introduction of shaped and fitted garments in the 14th Century. With the development of tailored techniques, the form and construction of garments created a new dimension in male dress, which enhanced the quality of material, colour and decoration - features which differentiated one man's appearance from another and served to indicate his position within society.

Previously, clothing for both sexes had been comparatively similar. Remains of Bronze Age garments excavated from graves in Denmark suggests that the suit was also a feature of the primitive male dress. (Byrde, 1979, p.46). The suit was composed of simple shapes which took the form of a tunic, a mantle and leg coverings. The construction of these garments was relatively simple, based on the rectangular lines of the body. Instead of cutting the cloth to shape the natural contours of the body, the cloth was draped over the figure using special techniques of stitching and fastening. These garments were often made of similar fabrics with a combination of different shades, textures and types of ornamentation revealing a common theme, such as the suit silhouette.

Developments came about in the 14th Century with the evolution of tailoring techniques. When tailors began to cut the cloth to fit the body and adapted their skills to the problems imposed by this new concept of fashion, dramatic changes in the appearance of men's clothing resulted. The tunic was worn short with a level of tightness about the shoulders and the shirt was narrowed to a close fit over the hip







which allowed for extra padding to the chest (plate 1). The legs were exposed to view and the trousers were cut to the shape of the leg, held in place by ties fastened to the tunic. The characteristic line of this style was long and thin and appeared to elongate the body. (Byrde, 1979, p.46). Although variations of style modified the appearance of male dress throughout history, fashion never reverted back to the unstructured garments of primitive dress.

By the 17th Century the transformation of tailored garments was complete. This transformation did not represent an entirely new dimension to men's clothes - since the suit silhouette, breeches, tunic and upper tunic was based on a long tradition - but its different composition portrayed a new pattern for the future. (Byrde, 1979, p.71).

From the late 17th Century onwards the three-piece suit was frequently modified, but its basic form remained unchanged. The suit was composed of jacket, waistcoat and trousers which were intended to be worn together but were not necessarily of the same colour and material (plate 2). It was not uncommon for the trousers and waistcoat to differ from the jacket in both shade and fabric. While coat and breeches often matched, the waistcoat might be similar in tone but decorated in a different manner. Fancy waistcoats, embroidered or made in patterned fabric, continued to be worn. (Byrde, 1979, p.71). In the late 17th Century and during the 18th Century, silks of various types were commonly used by those who could afford it for formal wear, and wool for day wear. Thus, the common elements of men's clothing has remained relatively constant throughout the years.

The turn of the 20th Century is often regarded as a high point in the history of men's fashion, a period of considerable style and refinement. From the point of view of male dress, Edward VII was undoubtedly an influential figure; he was passionately interested in clothes and was, to a certain extent, an innovator. (Byrde, 1979, p.89). His clothes and appearance were closely watched and copied by the men of his generation.









Plate 1 : 14th Century Dress, Two Men at the Court of Edward IV, 1470-1480









**Plate 2 :17th Century Dress, Family of Sir Richard Saltonstall, by David des Grange c. 1645. The long vertical look continued to predominate.**







In ways, the Edwardian period appears to have reacted against the strait-laced atmosphere of the Victorian era. However, elements of flamboyant decoration and elaboration, which are characteristic of the Victorian period, remain evident among society, which suggests that the Victorian era also influenced the Edwardian period. This period was torn between the old aristocratic, class stratified model of society, with the increasing emphasis on democracy, and the glorification of the common man. (Byrde, 1979, pp 89-90). The strict social convention did not relax before the out-break of the First World War. In comparison with the year which followed, the Edwardian era seems to have been in every way a time of gaiety and frivolity, inspired and encouraged by the monarch himself.

The frock coat was nearing the end of its fashionable life and by the early 20th Century it was mainly worn by the elderly. After the war the frock coat failed to be revived and the lounge coat was rapidly assuming all the respectability of the Victorian frock coat. The style which overwhelmed the youth of this period was mainly double-breasted jackets with four or six buttons, generally worn open; it was usually black, or sometimes grey, and was accompanied by either matching, striped or checked trousers (plate 3). The lounge jacket could be single or double-breasted, it was long with short lapels. The sleeves were slit at the cuffs with button-fastenings and accompanied by four pockets, two flap pockets at the hips, an outside breast pocket and a ticket pocket. As a rule, the front edges of the single breasted jacket were rounded at the bottom; the lapels and other points of the double-breasted jacket were sharply cut; waistcoats and trousers usually matched the jacket. (Byrde, 1979, p.90). The trousers appear narrow and short and were often turned up; creases were not essential but sharp and neat when worn.

The general impression of men's dress in the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War was very neat and proper; well-tailored column-like silhouette, with a long straight jacket and slender cut trousers decreased the emphasis of ornamentation. Between 1914 and 1918, men's clothing altered very little as a direct result of inflation caused by war which ruined many people of independent means and undermined high aristocratic features thought to be eternal. (Byrde, 1979, p.90).









**Plate 3 : Street Fashion on Boulevard Montmartre, c. 1900**

**Bowler, stiff collar, four-button lounge suit.**







Due to rationings of food and supplies of raw materials, people had to restrict their standards of living to a practical way of life. Money was in short supply and the economy in need of repair. This social upheaval had dramatic effects on society, resulting in the deterioration of the aristocratic class and the simplifying of costume. In the long term, the war and the subsequent economic and social upheavals had dramatic effects on style of both male and female dress. (Byrde, 1979, pp.90, 91). Men returned from war bursting with impatience and devised a totally different image and style influenced by other nations, launching 'the modern era' of the 20th Century. Everything encouraged change and dress followed suit!

The mad years of the roaring twenties was a period of illusion and experimentation following on from the harshness of war. The 1920's saw an increased tendency towards informality in men's dress due to a lessening of rigid etiquette. In addition, influence of American fashion and a growing interest in sport all encouraged reform in dress and freedom of expression in clothing. (Chenoune, 1993, ch. 14). The Oxford bags and the striped blazer, however, a style which may reflect the new-found freedom, did not last sufficiently long to have a serious effect upon male dress. This outburst of men's fashion may have been a direct result of the conservative design of the military uniform. (Byrde, 1979, pg. 73, 74). Uniforms were designed to set standards and inspire confidence, they confer a sense of identity and responsibility on the wearer and contribute to a disciplined appearance. The Oxford bags portrayed a sense of freedom and rejected the strait-laced appearance to which society had become accustomed (plate 4). The male silhouette slimmed down - looser, softer clothes were greatly encouraged - rediscovering the waist typical of an idealized, slim sporty young man. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 136).

Even prior to the war it was evident that the social structures of Europe were changing dramatically; social barriers were being questioned and it became increasingly apparent that a healthy bank balance upheld more respect than heritage of birth. (Bennett-England, 1967, pg. 31).









**Plate 4 : Lucien Hector Jones, A young dandy on the beach, c. 1921,  
fashionable for a sporting lifestyle**







In 1929, the Wall Street stock market crash had a devastating effect on society - production fell, salaries dropped and unemployment increased. The fashion industry was hit by shrinking budgets and a lack of disposable income amongst clients. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 173). The industry recorded that customers spent more time looking than buying garments. By the early Thirties manufacturers began to respond to this retrenchment by producing styles which were tailored with a minimum amount of decoration features.

The Thirties was a period of economic and political upheaval, relieved to some extent, at least for the ordinary man, by cinema and magazine articles which acted as a form of escapism from the harshness of life. Influential people of this period included the Duke of Windsor and film stars, such as Fred Astaire, Gary Cooper and Cary Grant, who appeared to be untouched by the severity of the depression. Male actors dressed for the camera just as they did in everyday life. Masculine stylishness on the screen thereby had an authenticity which made it easier for spectators to assess, admire and imitate role modes whose styles were constructed yet comfortable. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 186).

The design lines of the suit silhouette at this time reflected the difficulties of society with its straight lines and angles, from creased pants to square shoulders. Although the style was quite geometric it appeared comfortable and striking - as if reflecting society but also suggesting a sense of hope for the future (plate 5).

By the end of the 1930's, men's suits have a less exaggerated cut, and with the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, fashion once again stood virtually at a standstill. Relatively few new suits were manufactured as so many men were in the service, and most made do with their pre-war clothing. In 1941, the rationing of cloth and clothes was introduced, and remained constant up until 1949. Rationing included a number of utility regulations which governed the making of suits. Utility clothing was of a lesser quality: wool was mixed with cotton to decrease the amount of wool used. Every feature of the suit was reduced to a minimum to save materials - the waist was omitted, the jacket could no longer include pleating or darted pockets









**Plate 5 : 1930 style silhouette**

**Clark Gable an influential figure of men's fashion, 1935**







and backs or martingales. Padding in the shoulder and torso regions of the jacket were also forbidden by the utility regulation. (Chenoune, 1993, p.203, 204). Jackets were mainly single-breasted with two or three buttons down the front, the style consisted of a minimal amount of decorative features - there was only one breast pocket, the cuffs were no longer trimmed with buttons. Trousers had no pleats, turn-ups or back pockets (plate 6). (Byrde, 1979, pg. 93). These regulations affected all standards of living.

By the late 1940's when Britain started to recover from the war, men began to buy clothes again, and there was a renewed interest in fashion amongst younger men. The new look was a reaction against the dreariness of wartime dress, a certain nostalgia for the past and an attempt to introduce new life into the clothes of the present. Improved techniques, a wider range of cloth and pattern, and a greater variety in design raised the standards of the ready-made suit and with increasing costs of bespoke tailoring, the established tailors began to decline. (Chenoune, 1993, p.204).

Man-made fibres, which were cheaper and more practical, came into widespread use and by the mid-1950's terylene trousers were available in chain stores. Mixtures of natural and man-made fibres, such as terylene and acrilan, were frequently adopted and used in the manufacturing of the suit. The inspiration for men's fashion was no longer the province of the upper and middle classes but rather that of the young men of all class distinctions. Very dark suits were worn with the white shirts, the cut of the jacket was narrower, and the edges were curved similar to the Edwardian period earlier in the Century (plate 7). This new style in men's clothing, reminiscent of the pre-war period of 1914, was in direct contrast to the casual characteristic of style in the roaring twenties. The Edwardian traits were eagerly adapted to the innovations which appeared in the 1950's (plate 8) - coats with velvet collars and cuffs; longer, narrow straight leg-cut trousers. The dreariness of utility and demob suits became partly responsible for the return to a style known for its refinement. (Byrde, 1979, pg. 92-93).









Plate 6 : 1940 style silhouette

A suit coat from two meters of cloth as opposed to the usual three.









**Plate 7 : 1950's style silhouette**

**A double-breasted vest with ample lapels, part of an Edwardian suit, 1954**









**Plate 8 : A Velvet Coat, 1955**

**Similar to the Edwardian style, silhouette at the turn of the century.**







The war over, men returned from the army so used to the close fitting tunics of the army uniform that they found their old suits square and baggy, and welcomed a slimmer more natural style. This new style was adopted and modified into a distinctive look for young men, who became known as the "teddy boys". The changing shape of the trouser is probably the most significant element: the narrow line required a different cut, to curve and show the shape of the leg. Jackets were considerably reduced in length and width, with shoulders less pronounced; sleeves, lapels and collars were all narrowed; and two-piece suits became popular.

Men's fashion was traditionally set by the older, wealthier, more established man, but the 1960's saw significant changes to this pattern. The street symbolised revolutionary ideas which resulted in the formation of movements such as hip, pop, mod and punk. Demonstrations and marches on social and political issues were not uncommon; society demanded change, change in lifestyle and ideals. The women's liberation movement, gay rights activists, and other pressure groups took to the streets to protest and promote. Consciousness raising led to increasing self-awareness, self-expression and individualism which inevitably influenced the fashion of the time. The hippy movement, for example, celebrated freedom of dress - a style referred to as anti-fashion which was produced from cast-off, modern Western style and influenced by ethnic dress. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 285-286). For the fashion industry, the street became the initial source of inspiration, as it comprised of individual styles; which related to the different anti-fashion movements, each with a dress code of its own. This mass market enhanced designers to discard the traditional style silhouette and concentrate on the fashion trends of the street. "The increasingly casual body positions and poses adopted by young people are obliging garment manufacturers to design clothing differently", stressed *Le Journal du Textile* in 1970. (Chenoune, 1993, p.285).

These movements injected life, colour and ornamentation into the process of buying and wearing clothes, especially for young men. Experiments were carried out with shapes and designs to complement those trends on the streets. (Byrde, 1979, pg. 96). Pierre Cardin's ideas were probably the most influential of this period, his collar-less







jacket was immediately made famous when it was worn by the Beatles in the early Sixties (plate 9). The Cardin-inspired suit still reflected style characteristics of the Edwardian period, emphasizing the ideals of self-expression, youthful upheaval and freedom. The jacket was round-necked, with low-cut collars. This style omitted the lapels to allow freedom to the neck. The length of the jacket was short and its edges emphasized a relaxed, natural look which reflected the life-style of this period. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 274-277). The pockets were slit to minimize the bulkiness of the jacket. The trousers were long and fitted, with a centre crease down the leg front.

In general, there was a bolder use of bright colours and patterns in shirts, ties and suits. On the whole, designers were trying to break away from the formal conventions of the two and three piece suits so that the emphasis was on alternatively more informal garments. Although the suit of this period did not alter radically in shape and form, men in general enjoyed more freedom in the choice of colour, pattern, texture and accessories.

Within the fashion industry today, an atmosphere of increased competition is evident, provoked by a world of media hype, film and advertising, also the increasing improvements in technology to enable top quality garments. For fashion designers it has become more than ever, an important factor to remain visible among the consumer market. The strategy of high exposure was adopted by the industry in the early eighties by designers, so they used the street for advertising with logos, signs, billboards and images. The hype for designer-made clothes in the eighties turned secondary school into an aggressive battlefield of logos and brands of clothing which became cult objects, synonymous with class and money. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 307-308).

Fashion designers today are inspired by styles from the past, incorporating certain elements of style and transforming them into a more modern design; taking features of style, texture, shape and form from several areas of fashion history, combining the elements of old style to produce a new modern design.









Plate 9 : Pierre Cardin suit silhouette, Cardin Suit, worn by the Beatles in 1963







In the eighties, Jean-Paul Gaultier used the 1940's style zoot suit to inspire and enhance his 1985 collection; with a pin-striped jacket, oversized tie, standing collar-feature of the Edwardian period and showing the cuffs. All design features harking back to the zoot suit as its most deficient, while adding a completely contemporary touch of a skirt to the trousers; as if the full pants of the zoot suit had collapsed into an overskirt that formed their own apron (plate 10). This feature of design was also used by Vivienne Westwood in 1988 and Stephen Sprouse in 1983. (Martin-Koda, 1989. pg 112).

The new silhouette of the 1990's is slightly more structured to the revival style zoot suit by Jean-Paul Gaultier. This new silhouette replaces the unstructured fashions of the sixties; with high buttoning, single breasted suits with two, four, six or eight buttons. Fashion designers today prefer to keep designs relatively simple and comfortable and engage their attention to the combination of different textures and colours within the silhouette to create life and body to their garments.

The soft and easy shaped styles today which are similar to the 1930 style silhouette suggest the recycle element in fashion and that men's attitude to dress may be reverting back to the elegance and sovereignty of the 1930's period. (GQ, August 1994).

The strongest fashion statement of the 1990's is the liberation of the waistcoat from the three-piece suit, the waistcoat now appears without the jacket and trousers.

From this exploration of the history of the suit there is sufficient evidence that the suit of the nineties is largely derived from its 1930's counterpart. The following chapter is a study of the 1930's suit and the factors which influenced it.







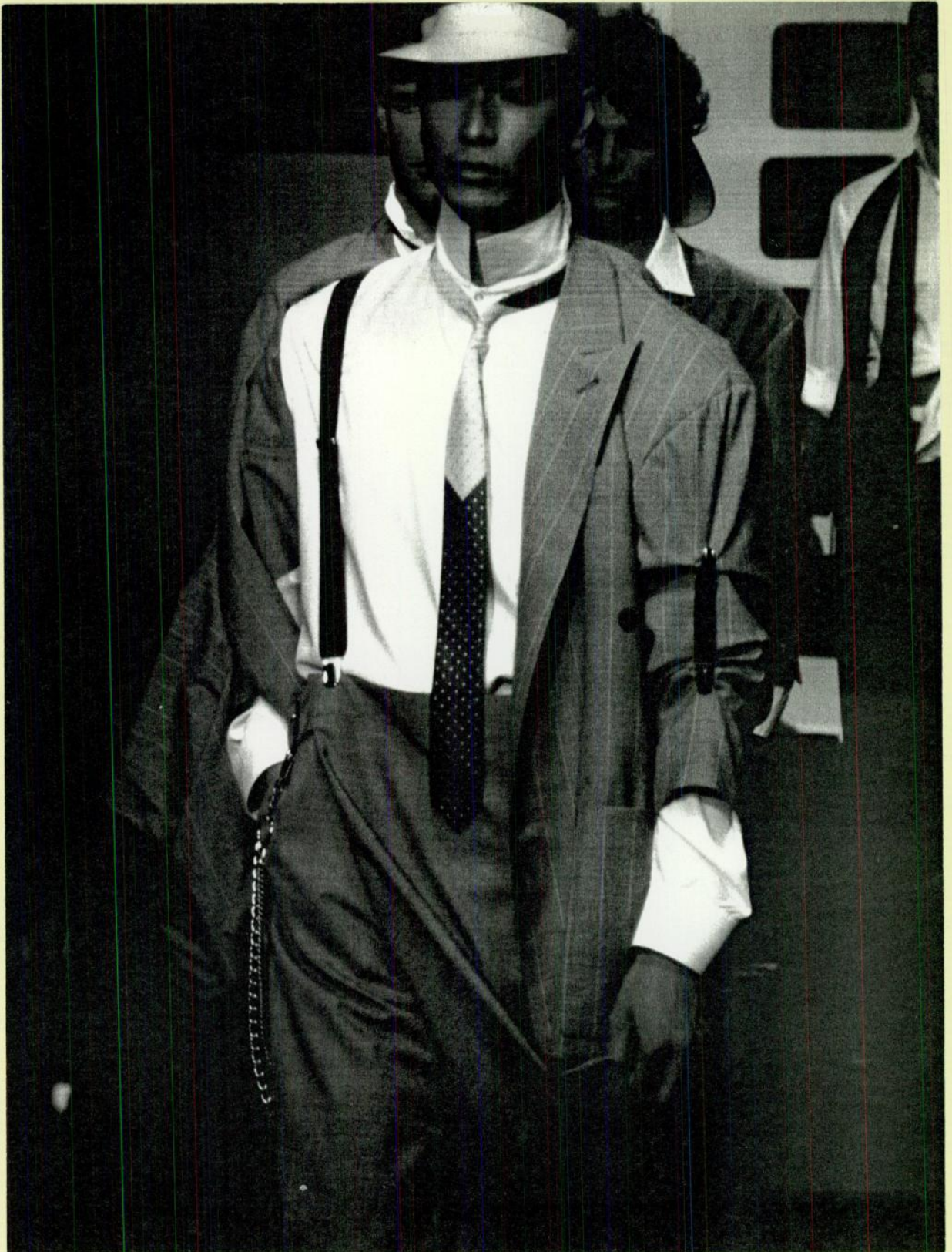


Plate 10 : Jean-Paul Gaultier; Zoot Suit, with skirt pants

Published in Vogue Hommes International, Paris, Spring/Summer, 1985







## Chapter Two : 1930's Fashion

This chapter is a study of the suit within the 1930's. It deals with the demise of the flamboyant suit of the 1920's. It shows how social, political and economic factors influenced the change in attitude that led to the creation of a new dress style for men. This new dress style developed throughout the 1930's. This development and the factors which influenced it are explored in the following section.

### Social History

In tracing the history and development of men's tailored fashion, it is obvious that, apart from the necessity and desirability of wearing clothes, two particular influences have manifested themselves throughout: sociological and economical. (Bennett-England, 1969, p.29).

Society's attitudes towards men's fashion altered after the First World War. Prior to the war, clothes had been a symbol of status and wealth rather than a manifestation of the desire to be well-dressed. The higher class always had a large and varied wardrobe, whilst the lower class obtained a basic one. By the late twenties and early thirties, the social structure of western civilisation had changed dramatically, and brought with it the birth of the business man. As social barriers altered it became apparent that one's wealth became the object of respect and admiration rather than one's social position in society. (Bennett-England, 1969, p.29).

Working class clothing had always been of inferior quality cloth and workmanship - but, except for minor style variations, clothing became reasonably class-less in the thirties. The introduction of machine tailoring heralded mass markets in menswear, but, however good-looking, this did not necessarily mean good quality. Whether this decrease in quality directly reflected the lack of knowledge of technology, or whether it was due to social circumstances when the mass markets were unable to afford good quality garments, is unclear. These cheaper copies of garments enabled the lower income male to build up an inexpensive wardrobe. Decorative and stylistic







features, which identified one's position, ceased to be an important factor of fashion. The simplistic style and form of the 1930's silhouette reflected society; a society torn between economical and social difficulties. (Bennett-England, 1969, p.31).

As the standard of living improved, so did man's production methods and knowledge of tailoring, resulting in better quality garments. As the fashion industry progressed, manufacturers emphasized the importance of training employees to ensure that their employees would have a greater knowledge and understanding of equipment; which would result in an increase of quality and cost. (Byrde, 1979, p.93).

People's ideals within society had changed as a result of the Depression and by the late 1930's society emphasized the importance of re-building its economy and creating employment in order to increase standards of living.

These changes in fashion, started by the wealthy youth of the twenties, now began to make their presence felt among the lower classes. Manufacturers created styles which were different and pleasing to all areas of society. The 1930's style silhouette was to act as the basic shape and style for men's fashion throughout this century. (Chenoune, 1993, p.174).

#### The Birth of the Classic Style

In 1929, the Wall Street stock market crashed, triggering a devastating economic depression that struck first the United States, and then Europe. The Wall Street crash ended the excitement of the roaring twenties; production fell, salaries dropped, consumption slowed and unemployment increased. (Chenoune, 1993, p.173). These were features which continued well into the thirties.

The garment industry and fashion trade were hit by shrinking budgets; and consumers spent more time looking, seeking bargains from companies going out of business. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 173). Simple and sensible became the trend for a fashion world bewildered by economic crisis. Tailors adopted to the new situation







by proposing a more modest form of stylishness, closer to customers' actual needs. Styles were to be structured and comfortable, with a minimum of decorative features. Shop windows submitted to the ubiquitous realism of the period by projecting an image of real - rather than idealized. The image reflected the diversity of physical and social changes which now dominated society. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 174).

The rise of communism and fascism was escalating within society and they committed themselves to political causes as a form of engagement with modern times. This political surge within society resulted in the transformation of male attitudes to dress. These signs of revolution in bearing, eventually transformed men's shoulders into the elegant geometric shape of the 1930's. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 174). However, not only the military uniform caused the change in style, but other elements like outdoor sports had modified men's physical build, so that the ideal image entailed wide shoulders, straight backs and narrow hips, flat stomachs and steady legs.

The classic style of the 1930's was to reflect the social and economic upheavals of the thirties, whilst showing strength and a will to be powerful against the Depression. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 175).

As society changed, so did the role of men within it. Gentlemen of leisure found that the social rites that once regulated their day, requiring successive changes in clothing, no longer reflected the economic exigencies of the period. (Byrde, 1979, p.90). Tailors tried to maintain the luxurious fiction that changes in garment were required for different social events. This objective, of distinguishing working clothes from dinner dress, was unrealistic for the majority of society. The modern middle class man considered these distinctions in dress to be old fashioned and inappropriate to the lifestyle of the professional man. Society focused its energy on business, improving the economy, concentrating on ways and means of improving lifestyles. Fashion responded in the classic style with a suit silhouette that, on the one hand portrays the harshness of modern times, with its angular, structural elements, and, on the other hand, exudes comfort and tranquillity (plate 11), suggesting hope for the









**Plate 11 : Gregory Peck in The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit, 1956, in a 1930's style suit**







well-being of the future. This modern geometric style of elegance was composed of straight lines and angles, from creased pants to square shoulders which would survive for many years. (Chenoune, 1993, pp. 174, 175).

### Influences

The 1930's were thus concerned with elegance and style. It resolutely adhered to standards of beauty and taste and its attention to detail is without parallel.

During the Depression the ordinary working class found comfort in engaging themselves in recreational pastimes as a form of escapism from the bleakness of modern times. There was a new interest in cinema and an added interest in media coverage, newspaper and magazine articles which published extensive interviews with royalty and socialites. (Chenoune, 1993, p.182). The working classes took great interest in the fashion of those whose lives remained unaffected by the Depression. Royalty, the Duke of Windsor and Hollywood actors, such as Gary Cooper, Cary Grant and Fred Astaire, were most influential in the 1930's. (Flusser, 1985, pg. 4-5).

It could be argued that the Duke of Windsor was the most influential role model of this period; he dressed in a manner of personal satisfaction rather than to the standards of male dress set by the elite of previous year. He was regarded as a man of style and often elements of his style were adopted by those who read of his lifestyle. (Martin-Koda, 1989, p. 160). In 1936 (plate 12), he wore a dashing crisp tailored suit, designed by Savile Row tailors - an image of a self-confident and utterly at ease gentleman is portrayed by this suit silhouette. A double-breasted suit, the design lines appear angular and structure with peaked lapels and a trace of silk emerging from the pocket. The pose lends an air of informality to the occasion, a trait to be admired by the ordinary man. The Duke of Windsor encouraged individuality in dress, and he favoured the mixing of pattern and textured fabrics. In the double-breasted suit, the quality of the garment shows the sovereignty of the tailoring. (Martin-Koda, 1989, p.162).









Plate 12 : Duke of Windsor, 1936, a crisp tailored suit by Savile Row Tailors







He believed that the silhouette did not necessarily have to be worn as a match and in 1937 he combined a formal business suit with the suave touches of a striped dress shirt and dotted tie (plate 13). Although he denounced the rules of male dress, rules which dictated the combination of garments and the attire of a gentleman (Martin-Koda, 1989, p. 162), the Duke of Windsor always seemed to be dressed correctly for any occasion. His large, full-knotted neck-tie - wide in girth and worn with spread collar shirts - known as the Windsor knot - contributed to a formidable style that would endure in men's fashion. In the illustration, the Duke of Windsor is wearing a black silhouette with a contrasting striped shirt and a tie knotted to the Windsor knot construction. The overall image portrays the elegance of mixing patterns and textured garments.

One of Hollywood's most self-assured men-about-town was Fred Astaire, whose magical, creative talent on the dance floor was coupled with a personal sartorial grace. (Martin-Koda, 1989, p. 162).

In 1936, Astaire introduced the collar pin into men's fashion. The collar pin accentuates the closure of the collar points and the narrowness of the knot of the tie. Like the Duke of Windsor, Astaire also took pleasure in mixing patterns, adopting striped shirts and dotted ties, which eventually emerged onto the streets. The collar pin (plate 14) was of no structural necessity except to hug the collar to the tie and provide a type of jewellery for men of fashion. (Martin-Koda, 1989, p. 165).

At this time, men realised that clothing should not be worn to hide the material lines of the body (as the sack suit), but rather to conform to them, thereby enhancing the male physique. Clothes were to become part of the man which enabled men to be individual among the masses.

### 1930 Style

Sport modified men's physical build - wider shoulders, straight backs, narrower hips and flatter stomachs - and this was matched by the suit of the time.









**Plate 13 : Duke of Windsor, influential figure of men's fashion, innovative use of fabric combining, 1937**









**Plate 14 :** Fred Astaire, 1936, dominated style in the 1930's, use of the collar pin







Not all men, however, were built like athletes. Therefore, a number of artifices were employed to make less emphatic shoulders square, wide and high. The padding of the male frame complemented the male figure. Wadding was added to the shoulder, armholes were raised, sleeves tapered to the wrists and a dart was placed under the arm to accentuate this new image. The introduction of pointed lapels really commended the metamorphosis of the male torso. Peaked lapels enhanced the spread of the V-shaped neck on both single and double-breasted suits (plate 15). This geometric style, that angled up the chest right to the summit of the shoulder, suggests an image of power and authority. (Chenoune, 1993, p. 175).

Fashion manufacturers produced many variations in detail: two, four, six or eight buttons, long or short tails, sharp or softened shoulder or different lapels, but the elegance of style remained constant. While the long, broad lapels accentuated the square shoulders, six buttons marked a high waist line and straight, ventless back hugged the hip. Long wide trousers enhanced this column-like shape and served as a base of the athletic silhouette that placed a neoclassic stamp on masculine elegance in the 1930's (plate 16). (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 178).

Patterned suits, popularised by the Duke of Windsor, were worn from the most humble to the most famous, from the unemployed to Hollywood celebrities. In fact, striped suits, seemed to have graced the shoulders of every man in the 1930's. This innovative use of blending and combining textures, against both plain and elaborate background fabrics, conveys endless possibilities of mixing shades and tones of garments to create individual styles. The somewhat shadowy chalk stripe, launched by the Duke of Windsor, became a standard element of men's fashion as it lengthened and enhanced the suit silhouette.

For tailors, patterned fabrics posed countless obstacles in the make-up of garments. Each line had to match absolutely perfectly, from the centre front to the side seams. The checked fabric pattern yields a refined play on vertical and horizontal lines that intersect at regular intervals over the weave. When using checked fabrics in tailoring it is important that the horizontal lines match up at the side seams (plate 17).









**Plate 15 : Gary Cooper, 1930, an influential figure in men's fashion in the 1930's**







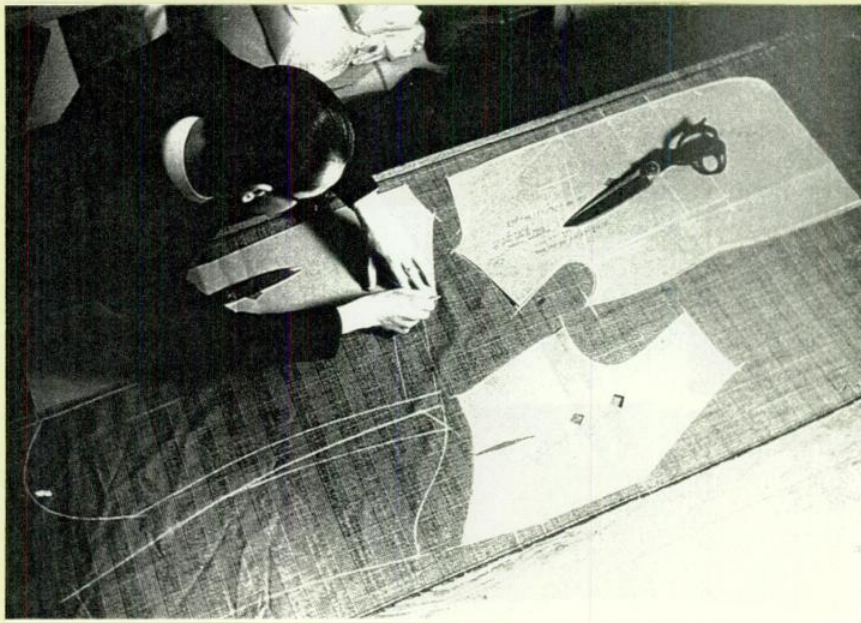


**Plate 16 : A double-breasted suit silhouette, Cary Grant, 1930**









**Plate 17 : A Savile Row Tailor, 1939.**

**In making glen plaid suit "matching the checks" was of prime importance.**







In the suit of the 1930's a new modern classic style was emerging, providing a centre of gravity for masculine elegance in the 20th Century. (Chenoune, 1993, pg. 178).

It is evident that the 1930's gave birth to the suit we see on our streets today. This suit development during this decade, due to the particular political, social and economic elements that prevailed. It was factors such as the great Depression and the subsequent need to economise which led to the suit characteristics, simple pure quality of line. (Chenoune, 1993, pp. 173, 174). It was indeed the same logistics that led to this suit as was popular in 'architectural theory' at the time. The suit of the 1930's is the embodiment of the philosophy of the Bauhaus captured in the words of Mies Van Der Koho, "less is more" and "form follow factor". The popularity and mass appeal of this suit was largely a result of the development and popularity of cinema cultures, which showed the suit on screens across America and Europe worn by the idols of both rich and poor alike. It is likely that the simple elegance and common sense design of the 1930's suit, together with its exposure to the masses, are responsible for the fact that it remains with us today. The following section looks at the suit of the 1990's and its relationship to its 1930's counterpart.







### Chapter Three : 1990's Fashion

The suit of the 1990's has been largely affected by the classic suit developed in the 1930's. This is shown by comparing clothes from both decades. Although the cut of the 1930's style suit is the basis of the 1990's suit, there are significant changes in fabrics, colours and sometimes even the way it is worn. The following chapter explores how the suit of the 1930's has been applied to the 1990's fashion.

#### The Influence of Technologies and 1930's Style Menswear on 1990's Fashion

The 1930's was one of the most influential periods throughout the history of fashion. It portrays men as men, masculine yet elegant. The modern suit silhouette stems from the image of the 1930's style, straight back, broad shouldered, peaked lapels and pattern combination, all of which reflect elements of style from the 1930's.

The suit is regaining popularity among men today since the demobilization of garments in the anti-fashion decades of the sixties and seventies. (Chenoune, 1993, pp. 285-290). Men today wear suits with ties, but they also wear the same suits with sweaters or band collared shirts. The trend in male clothing is comfortable and easy, as it was in the 1930's. In apparel, the 1990's reflects "in general terms the grace of Astaire, the wit of Grant and the assurance of Gable". (Donna Karan, GQ, July 94, pg. 74). As role models of the thirties, these gender confident men have returned to the spotlight through the styles of the nineties.

The fashion of today emphasizes the idea of combining different fabrics and textures to create individual styles (plate 18) and taste reminiscent of the Duke of Windsor in the thirties.

With new technologies, that allow for lighter-weight weaves in comfortable blends, fabrics that were once restricted to the country image are now more acceptable in the manufacturing of the classic tailored style. The contemporary suit silhouette appears on tweeds, corduroy and soft fabric, with an extended colour palette, a luxury of the









**Plate 18 : Canali S.P.A., G.Q., August 94**  
**Suit silhouette reminiscent of 1930's style.**







Nineties' fashion which was more conservative in the Thirties. (G.Q., July 1994, pp. 72-78). Many earlier fabrics were considered bulky and awkward looking when made into classic tailored suits.

The quality of garments today are not necessarily expensive, in fact thanks to ever-improving technology, a less expensive suit today is of much better quality than those manufactured in the Thirties.

Patterned fabrics which were used in the Thirties have been revived and transformed into the new style classic suit of the Nineties. It is evident, from the analysis of the Thirties style silhouette, that patterns such as the Glen Plaid and the hair-line stripe, which were originally fabrics related to country dress in the Thirties, are presently seen in classic clothing styles by the intervention of modern technology. (Omelianuk, August 1994, pp.108-109).

The development of synthetic monofibres with natural characteristics, such as durability, resilience and drape, making the perennial advice about wearing wool less relevant. (Omelianuk, August 1994, p.110). These new advances in fabrics have added a whole new dimension to tailored classical style garments. The variety of fabric and texture allow one to express their individuality and incorporate a design image which is satisfying to one's appearance and personality. The fashion industry has incorporated one's need of individualism by creating styles in vast colour and fabric variations. These enable greater choice within the consumer markets and the acceptance of mixing and matching both garments and fabric tones to enhance one's individual style.

Although modern technologies valuably speed up manufacturing, more and more companies are reverting back to the hand-finishing techniques used in the Thirties to ensure top quality garments. Decorative features on suits today are limited and more subtle, for example, top stitching used on the lapels of the jacket and on the pockets indicate the quality and workmanship of a well-tailored garment. These decorative features add a new dimension of elegance to the style of modern suits.







Designers are giving more attention to colour, fit, durability and comfort of style, with a view to creating different images by adapting 1930's style suits.

"By 1930 to 1936, a handful of basic shapes were created that still prevail today as a sort of scale of expression, with which every man can protect his own personality and style".

Yves St. Laurent  
(Flusser, 1987, pg. 6)

The 1990's suit silhouette complements that of 1930's fashion, maintaining plenty of manly elegance. Robert Freda notes that these kinds of clothes are "a way to get back to our masculine root." (Omelianuk, GQ, July 94, pg. 74). The cut of the jacket is straight shouldered, button-holes are placed high to emphasize the torso and it flares out around the hips. The Nineties tailored garment symbolises the determination to uphold the quality and elegance of the Thirties suit by the construction and use of fabric within the silhouette. Although the style is quite geometric, the use of soft fabrics and the intervention of modern technology enable the suit shape to remain natural and curved. The shoulders are naturally shaped with only slight padding, a definite emphasis on the waist, but of a soft construction and comfortable fit to the body. The cut of the suit is smooth and does not call attention to itself; a style of elegance only achieved through softness of line.

In examining two illustrations, one from the Thirties (plate 19) and one contemporary (plate 20), it is not immediately obvious which suit silhouette belongs to which era. Both silhouettes are similar in style, shape and form.

The 1930's style is a single-breasted two-piece suit, which has three buttons situated high on the waist which emphasizes the length of the body. The collar of the shirt is held in by a neck pin, which focuses on the neck and the tightness of the collar. The combination of fabrics is evident, creating an understanding for mixing patterns and textures which were popular in the Thirties. The lapels appear peaked and angular to complement the squareness of the shoulders. The dominant V-shape of the tie suggests that, if the jacket were closed, the point of intersection of both sides







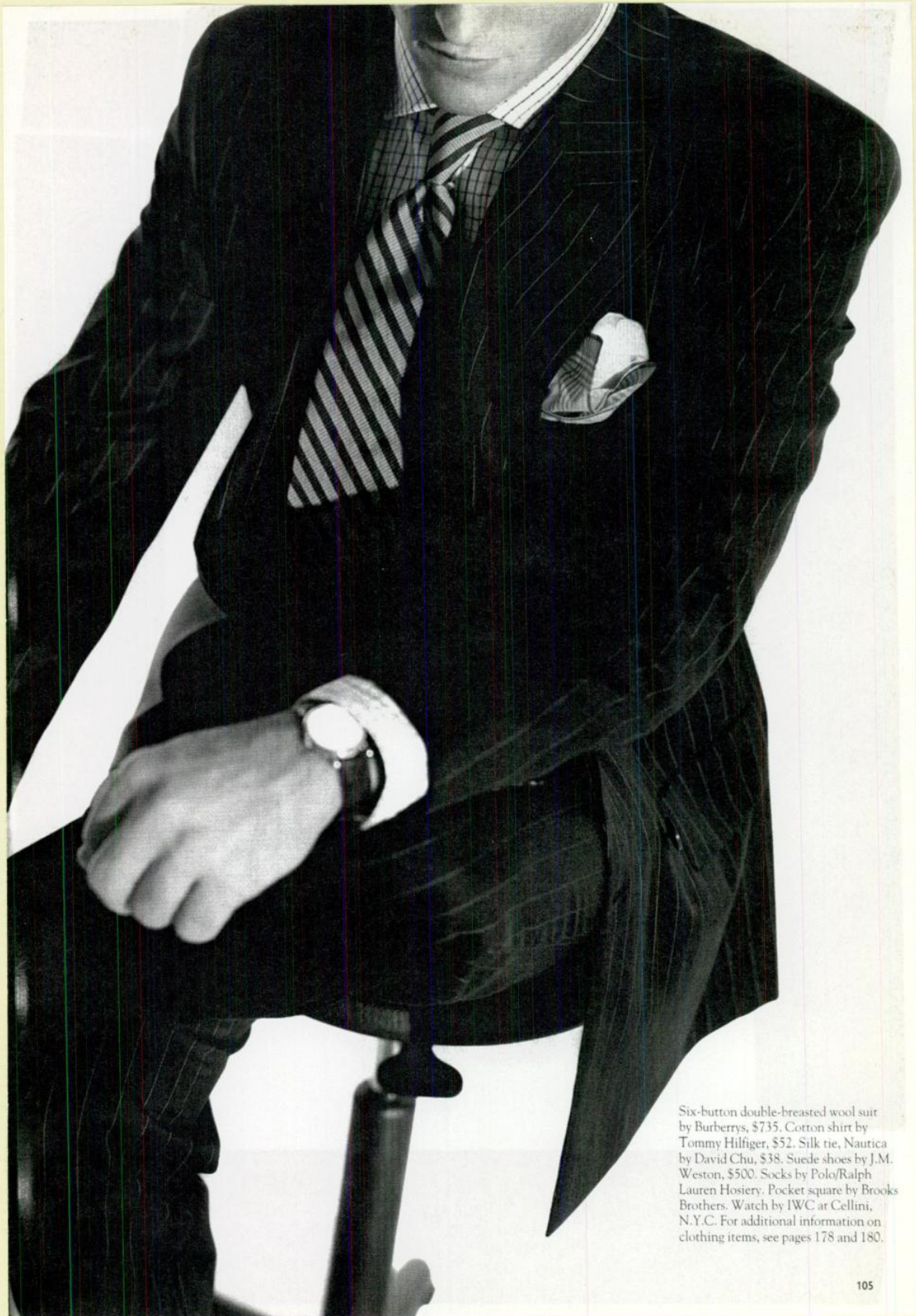


**Plate 19 : Paul Muni dressed for battle in Scarface, directed by Howard Jones, 1932**







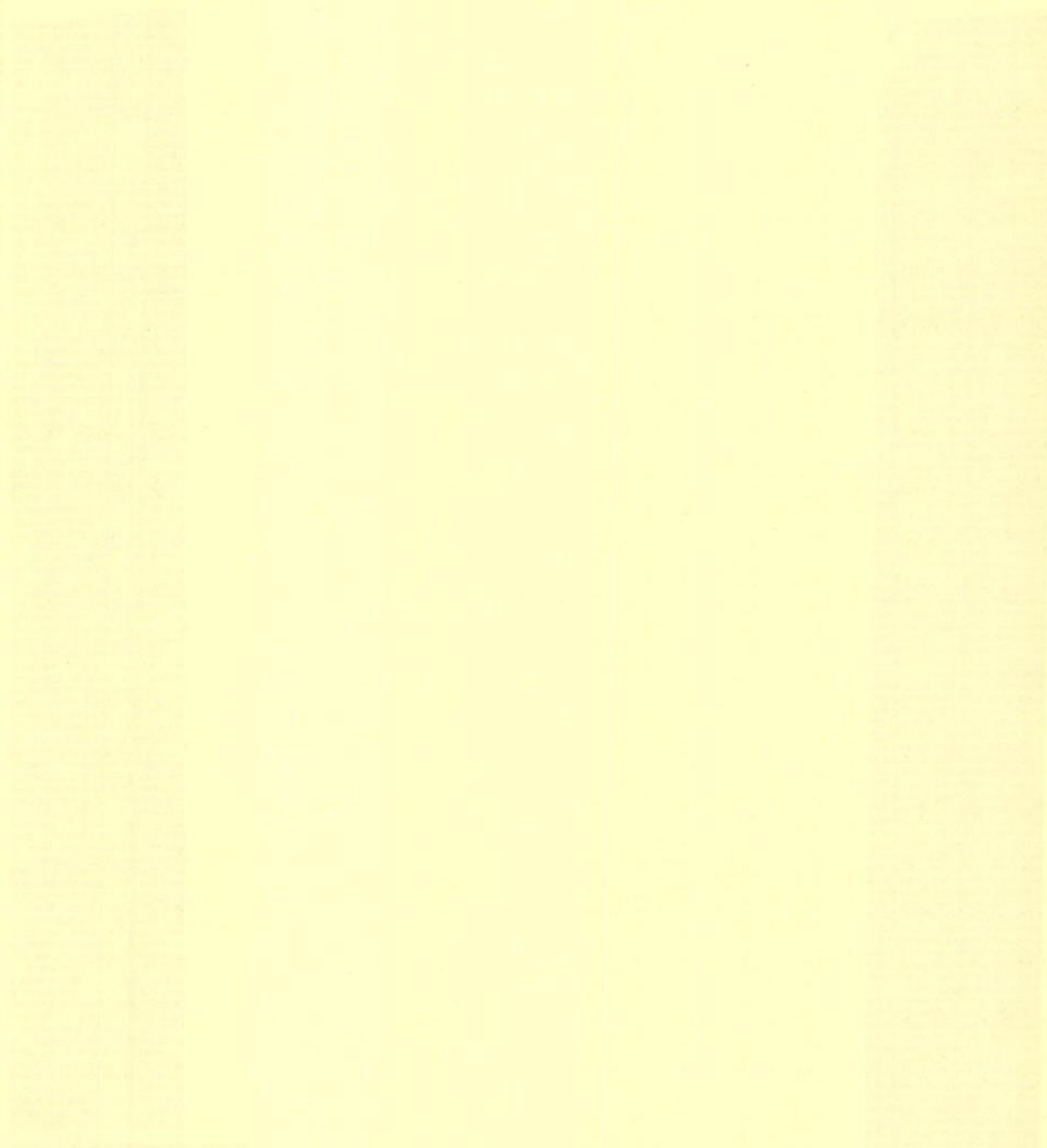


Six-button double-breasted wool suit by Burberrys, \$735. Cotton shirt by Tommy Hilfiger, \$52. Silk tie, Nautica by David Chu, \$38. Suede shoes by J.M. Weston, \$500. Socks by Polo/Ralph Lauren Hosiery. Pocket square by Brooks Brothers. Watch by IWC at Cellini, N.Y.C. For additional information on clothing items, see pages 178 and 180.

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**Plate 20 : Contemporary wool suit silhouette by Burberrys, GQ, August 94**







would appear to intersect at the tip of the tie. The hat is an added accessory to enable the wearer to create an individual style.

Many of these characteristics are noticeable in the illustration of the 1990's suit. The modern suit silhouette is a fine pin-striped woollen suit, with its closely spaced vertical stripe which elongates and slims the body. The jacket cut is of soft construction, not as angular as in the 1930's. This suit silhouette has incorporated the design features of the Thirties style; the shoulders are naturally shaped with the least amount of padding and the shape of the garment is soft rather than harshly geometrical. The silhouette is worn with a wide spread-collar shirt and tie. The tie is knotted in the form of the Windsor knot, an innovative feature of the 1930's period.

Both silhouettes have engaged themselves in the contrasting and mixing of patterns which, when combined, create an overview of elegance and comfort; and a sense of personality and freedom, which allows the materials to adopt themselves to the wearer's physique.

The 1990's have taken the simple and elegant cut of the 1930's suit, preserving the form while developing a variety of fabrics and colours to offer greater choice to the markets of the 1990's. This allows the 1990's man to dress in a classic and elegant manner while preserving his individuality. An important development in this decade is the acceptance of mixing and matching elements from different suits, yet, again expanding the choice available to the 1990's man.

Technology and production are also significantly different now than in the 1930's. The role of technology in fashion is explored in the following chapter.







## Chapter Four : Technology and Techniques

It is clear that the suit of the Nineties is largely a development of the finish, and classic building on the form of the classic 1930's suit. The single most catalytic factor has been the advancement of technology. The technology resources available today are vastly superior to those of the 1930's, offering almost infinite flexibility.

This chapter looks at the main areas; padding and pressing techniques, production lay planning and pattern cutting, and computer-aided design. It explores the facilities of tailoring in both the Thirties and Nineties.

### Sample Jacket, Padding and Pressing Techniques

Tailoring demands exactness and special techniques to produce the crisp details, durability and smooth lines that are characteristic of a well-tailored garment. Tailoring is the process by which the garments' design lines are defined and the garment is given a permanent shape and structure. Design lines such as collars and lapels are defined by sharp, neat edges, rounded or angular, and all lines within the garments should be smoothly curved or perfectly straight. Tailors' styles vary from the closely fitted suit to the loose coat that fits only at the shoulders. (Ledbetter, 1981, p. 1).

Historically, a tailored garment was made by a professional tailor who spent hours perfecting the shape of individual garments. Manufacturers, on the other hand, use a sample jacket, from which all designs are made; indicating the shape and patterns of each garment, where the interfacing goes and where the darts are situated on the front and back panels. In the diagram (plate 21) it is evident that the sample jacket is also a visual aid for the designer and a visual record of the types of padding and quantity required to produce the shape of the finished garment. It indicates how the different types of padding, interfacing, cotton melton, shoulder padding and cotton twill work with the fabric to produce a well tailored garment. (Chenoune, 1993, p. 226).









**Plate 21 : Sample Jacket, GQ 94, indicating the layout of the jacket's design lines**







Despite the varying results that can be obtained, the essentials of the sample jacket seldom differ year in year out, but they do differ from one manufacturer to another.

Wool canvas interfacing is woven from wool and hair fibres, this facing is used as a supporting fabric for the jacket front. This interfacing, used in the silhouette of both decades, adds shape and body to the jacket fabric and reduces wrinkling of the garment. (Meyers, 1989, p. 4). The pre-padding collar melton consists of two fabrics, French canvas and melton, which are machine stitched to the jacket fabric to construct the collar. The melton should be of a colour similar to the garment fabric. Since this pre-prepared under-collar fabric is often difficult to find in the colour and quantity required, felt is also acceptable and more frequently used now than in previous years. This supports the collar and gives a crisp body and sharp edge to the jacket lapels. The shoulder pads are shaped layers of cotton wadding covered with muslin used to define the shoulder area. Cotton twill is used to define the outer edges of the lapels and jacket front which controls the lapels roll line. (Meyers, 1989, p. 4).

It is important that manufacturers use padding techniques as part of their tailoring methods for it adds a second layer to the garment and reinforces the fabric (plate 22). When the padded garment is pressed it moulds the garment into shape and form of the male torso; the padding acts as a means of holding the shape. (Meyers, 1989, p. 4).

The pressing of garments is an integral part of the tailored process. Besides removing wrinkles, pressing is responsible for producing neat, flat darts and seamlines. The iron is used in tailoring to gently shape the fabric, using heat, moisture and pressure. Fabric which is suitable for tailoring can be shrunk in some areas and stretched in others so that it will hang perfectly as a finished garment. The amount of heat, moisture and pressure depends upon the weight and quality of the fabric. If your heat is too intense, the fabric fibres will flatten and produce an unattractive shine. Pressing cloth when wet will shrink and matt it. (Meyers, 1989, p.8).







- 1 Shoulder pads
- 2 Felt lining that gives added firmness to chest and armholes
- 3 Woolen chest piece that reinforces the chest, placed over the fabric forming the garment
- 4 Woolen fabric forming, along with the chest piece, the framework of the garment
- 5 Cross-cut band edging the chest piece
- 6 Braid to strengthen the fold in the lapels
- 7 Braid strengthening the edges to prevent deformation of the lapels
- 8 Braid around armhole to keep it firm when sleeve is added
- 9 Buckram stiffener to make pocket sturdier
- 10 Pocket and ticket pocket lining



**Plate 22 : Shows the framework of the jacket before the lining and trimmings have been added**







Flat seams can be safely pressed on flat surfaces. However, if a curved area of a garment is placed on a flat surface for steam pressing, the fullness of the fabric will shrink in order to fit into the limited space of the flat surface. For this reason, curved areas of garments are laid over a tailor's ham so that the ham fills out the shape of the garment. Steam pressing a curved area in this manner will not result in shrinkage, since the fabric is being pressed in conformity with its own shape. Using a dry iron, the procedure for pressing is to cover the fabric with a uniformly damp press cloth and then lay the hot iron on the damp press cloth until steam is produced. Pressure is added while the fabric is being steamed. Pressing a curved area of garment allows the fabric to drape over the ham while it dries. The areas to be flattened can be stuck sharply with a pounding block while the fabric is still steaming. This extreme pressure, coupled with the instant drying, usually produces the desired crisp edges. (Meyers, 1989, p.8).

Industrial pressing machines are constructed in a way in which the ham is built into the pressing table. This raised and rounded table enables the garment, when pressed, to mould to the contours of the male torso. After pressing, the fabric appears curved and moulded into shape, with all seams flattened perfectly. This type of pressing gives a standard shape to the fabric which reflects the cut and style of the garments. (Meyers, 1989, p. 9).

#### Production Lay Planning and Pattern Cutting

The interaction of computer functions with imagination, knowledge and experience of fabric characteristics, make the construction of individual patterns a different procedure.

Computer programs are now more flexible and it is possible to perform most flat pattern cutting operations on the computer, and to fuse manual and computer operations. Many designers who modify patterns on computer, still work with the addition of seam allowance. The speed of this operation allows innovative pattern cutters to work with the nett pattern. Early pattern cutting software was very rigid







in its approach as there was limited understanding of how designers worked, and limited capacity of equipment. (Nelms, 1976, p. 121).

An economical layout is usually prepared on paper of the same width as the cloth to be used. The pieces of pattern should touch, but not overlap. When the layout plan is finalised a carbon copy of it should be made. With commercial patterns, the surplus paper is trimmed before being placed on the cloth. When the most economical amount of material has been used then the fabric should be clamped and secured (plate 23) to the cutting table. Clamps were used to hold the fabric before the invention of the air suction method. The fabric and layout plan are placed on the cutting table, but in place of the clamps today, air pressure sucks the fabric down onto the table and holds it in place. This prevents the fabric from slipping (Nelms, 1976, p. 120). Then an industrial blade is used to cut the fabric into the pattern shapes for the garments.

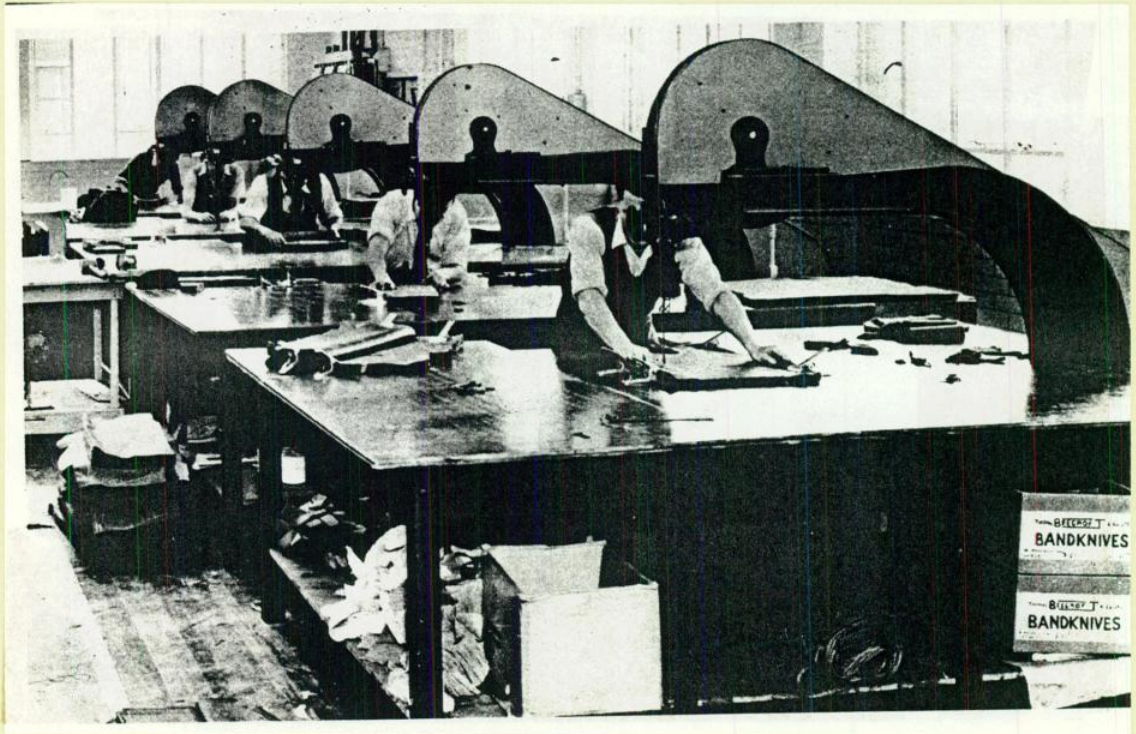
Different companies operate different methods of filling styles and casting lay plans related to the original design. Some systems require a piece number and a code which has instructions attached which relate to the design.

There are usually two, maybe more, lay plans for each garment. One lay plan for the main fabric and another for the interfacing, and wadding pieces. A model for each lay plan has to be constructed separately. The model is a grouping of pattern pieces, to be cut out in the particular fabric. Each lay plan (plate 24) does not necessarily contain each pattern piece for the make up of the garments, it may only be the facing piece. The lay plan length is determined by the number of garments in the order and the length of the cutting table. The pattern sizes, and the ratio of the sizes that are used in the lay plans, are entered into the computer and the piece appears on screen. (Nelms, 1976, p. 120). The system will reference each pattern piece and will construct a lay out plan which is most economical. It will then show on screen the lay plan which has the highest utilisation figure.







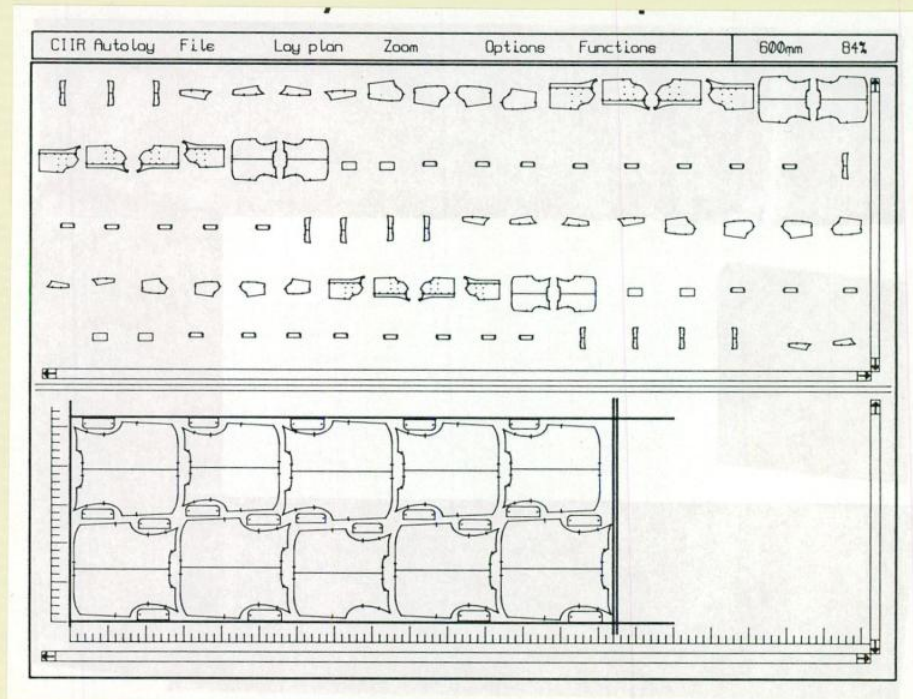


**Plate 23** : The use of clamps to hold the fabric in position while cutting the shapes









**Plate 24 : Production lay plan shown on a computer screen**







The introduction of computer technology into the fashion industry caused many problems between employees and technology. Many designers were not anxious to change from manual techniques of pattern construction and draping. They feared the unknown and the deterioration of their product in both quality and style, which would lead to a deterioration in sales in the market. Companies realised that in updating technology they would also have to educate staff to work this equipment. Many firms were reluctant at first due to the cost of training. Administration of design and pattern cutting on computer became very people dependent, as the pattern cutting procedure is the interaction between man and machine. (Cooklin, 1992, pp. 274-276). Computer-aided design speeds up the production of garments but they are still dependent on the knowledge and experience of the technician.

#### Computer-Aided Design

Only larger manufacturers could afford to introduce computers into the clothing industry as a design aid, due to the cost. The design procedure was thus divided into idea generation, textile design, pattern cutting, grading and marker making. The exchange of data between programmers and the continuing reduction of price of technology creates a greater range of options to manufacturers.

As designers have taken more interest in technology, they have demanded more flexibility; programs are now becoming available that fuse the operations or allow lines and colour images to pass between programs. Vector lines and images are registered by small lines between points. If the distance is small enough, the line appears smooth to the eye. These lines give an accurate measurement and manipulation of mathematical data for pattern cutting and grading operations. (Cooklin, 1992, p. 142).

Computer digitising (plate 25) is a more efficient way of changing the style of the pattern. Pattern for a design is cut manually and therefore, to grade the pattern on the system, the perimeter of the pattern has to be fed into the computer by digitising the contours. The pattern is placed on the digitisation and the pattern profile is entered









**Plate 25 : Computer digitising shown on the visual display unit, 1992**







into the computer by the use of a cursor. The centre of the cross hairs of the cursor are placed on points to be recorded. These points define the curves of the design. The cursor has a number of buttons which allow appropriate grade rule numbers to be typed into the system, for future reference on the relevant points as the pattern profile is digitised. Once the pattern is digitised, and on disk, the pattern can be recalled at any time and developed into a different style.

Pattern grading is a technique used to reproduce a pattern in other sizes. This is usually done after a sample design has been accepted. The CAD/CAM clothing system offers a faster, more consistent and accurate means of grading than manual graders, but the computer system is only as good as its operator. (Aldrich, 1985, p. 144).

The grading of a pattern is based on identifying where specific points of the pattern have to be extended or reduced to create a new size. These points are moved by means of x and y coordinates which tell the computer the direction of movement; measurements are also given to identify the position of the new points. (Cooklin, 1992, p. 276).

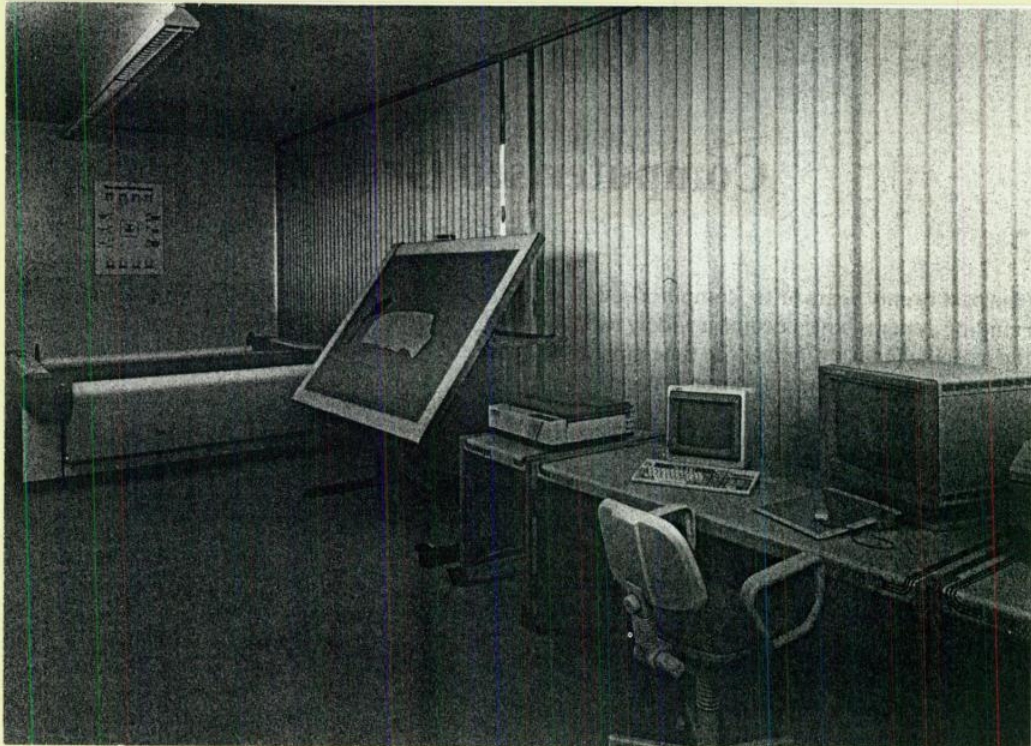
During the past twenty years computerised pattern grading systems have become a widely used tool in the clothing industry. Computerised pattern grading is graphic data processing applied to the grading of garment patterns. Many manual grading techniques, which require great skill and expertise on the part of the pattern grader, become routine, simple elements when carried out on a computerised system (plate 26).

The 1990's have married tailoring techniques with modern technology. Computers are used to produce a large variety of designed garments. Computerised machines are programmed to cut these garment patterns for various sizes. These patterns are then finished in the traditional manner in the interest of quality.









**Plate 26 : Computer system consisting of 5 units: (i) central processing unit, (ii) disk unit, (iii) visual display unit, (iv) the digiter, and (v) the plotter**







Technology has made it possible for a huge variety of choices in style and fabric, while its traditional finish ensures a quality garment. This offers substantive choice at an affordable price in the markets of the 1990's.







## Conclusion

The contemporary suit in its simple form inspired by the classic style of the 1990's has enhanced and encouraged the development of tailored garments.

The elegant and common sense design of the 1930's suit, together with its exposure to the masses, is responsible for the fact that it is still fashionable today. However, the 1940's has combined traditional tailoring with modern technology to create this simple yet innovative style.

Technology has made it possible for a wider variety of choice both in style and fabric, while the traditional finish ensures a quality garment. This allows substantive choice at affordable cost, therefore enabling the ordinary man in the street to create his own individual style.

The choice of the classic 1930's style, as a source of inspiration for the 1990's, is probably an economic one, given its simple form and limited decoration it ensures speedy manufacturing, while displaying a timeless, elegant style suitable for the contemporary form.

The growing attitude of self-expression allows the wearer freedom to wear the suit on sophisticated occasions or to combine the elements of the suit with other garments to give a more casual appearance. The concept of combining suit garments, introduced in the 1930's by the Duke of Windsor, has continued to develop throughout fashion and will remain a major factor in the future. With the innovation of fabric and texture combining, a new dimension and excitement has been added to men's tailored garments.















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